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AUTHOR	Hilmarsson-Dunn, Amanda
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ABSTRACT

The Icelandic language has a long and stable history, and Old Icelandic is still accessible to modern day Icelanders. This is despite being ruled from Denmark, with influence by the Danish language, for about 500 years. Icelandic may now be under a more serious threat from the onslaught of English. This paper evaluates the linguistic situation in Iceland, assessing whether language maintenance or change is the likely outcome. It shows how social factors such as age, gender, and education have influenced spoken Icelandic and how purist language policies have attempted to stamp out any variations. Iceland's strong social network has resisted change over the centuries, while the other Nordic languages have undergone dramatic changes, particularly in morphology. This resistance has been due in part to pride in their strong literary tradition and high literacy levels. At the same time, Icelandic has assimilated foreign words throughout its history, and it is likely that foreign vocabulary (predominantly English) will continue to be assimilated, and many neologisms will be invented. Information technology is the largest threat to the use of Icelandic. The globalization of English, although having an enormous impact in Iceland is also having the effect of strengthening Icelandic's resistance to change. (Contains 25 references.) (SM)

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University of Southampton

Centre for Language in Education

Icelandic: Linguistic Maintenance or Change? The Role of English

Amanda Hilmarsson-Dunn

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Introduction

Iceland is a country of about the size of England and Wales with a population of 280,000 people, half of whom live in the area of Greater Reykjavík. The Icelandic language has a long and stable history and old Icelandic is still accessible to modern day Icelanders. This is despite being ruled from Denmark - with the influence of the Danish language - for about five hundred years. Icelandic may now be under a more serious threat - that is, from the onslaught of English. This paper attempts to evaluate the linguistic situation in Iceland and to assess whether language maintenance or change is the likely outcome.

I shall give a brief sketch of Iceland's linguistic history. Then I shall look at the variation that is taking place in the language today to show that linguistic changes may be brought about by social factors but at the same time that resistance to changes may be due to a conservative social network, especially when supported by a high degree of literacy. I shall refer to the research into linguistic variation and maintenance that has been carried out in other countries and also to examples from history to attempt to assess what may be happening. Finally, I shall examine the impact that English as an international language is having on Icelandic today and how the Icelandic Language Committee is coping with the English invasion.

1 Iceland's linguistic history

Icelandic, along with the other Nordic languages, belongs to a subgroup of the Germanic language group. Linguistically, its most closely related languages are first, Faroese, and then Norwegian, that is to say that Icelandic has admitted the least change from Old Norse, Faroese more so and Norwegian dramatically so. Most of the settlers of Iceland came from Norway, land hungry and driven out by the politics of King Harald the Fairhair (870 – 930 AD). On their way, they stopped by in Shetland, Ireland and Britain, and traded some of their wealth for Irish slaves. The Irish element, (reinforced later by Irish missionaries) was responsible for introducing literacy. This enabled the writing of the oral traditions of the Icelanders; recording the settlement of Iceland, the famous *Landnámabók;* ('land taking book', i.e., the Book of Settlements, written in the twelfth century, which records the origins and descendants of the first settlers and their landholdings) and developing prose literature, e.g., the Icelandic sagas, early examples of historical novels. All these were written in the original Norwegian (Old Norse), which is still readable for the modern Icelander.

The fame of the Icelandic writers and poets spread far and wide. For example, Barrow (1835), writes that Gunnlaugr *skáld*, (poet) was Ethelred's bard in about 1004 and that there were many others employed as skalds in the courts of England. Even in Norway, Icelanders were regarded as experts in writing history, prose and poetry and were employed as bards and to write official biographies. (Vikor, 1993: 56) Icelandic literature reached its zenith in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the so-called 'Golden Age'. Denmark ruled Iceland from around 1400 to 1944, when Iceland became independent. Despite the influence of Danish, particularly in terms of vocabulary,

Icelandic has altered relatively little and 'has developed very little dialectical variation' in contrast to the dramatic changes to English during the same period. (Holmes, 1992: 235)

While in the rest of Europe literacy was rare, in Iceland it was universal through the centuries. One of the duties of the 'local' priest was to visit every farm at least once a year to examine the state of education of the young, i.e. to make sure that parents were educating their children properly. The priest maintained what was known as a visitatio book recording details of his visit to every home and would report his findings to one of the two bishops in Iceland. Barrow (1835: 237) in his travels around Iceland observed that 'by the almost universality of this system of domestic education, there is not probably, in any part of the world, an agricultural or rather pastoral peasantry so well informed and enlightened as those of Iceland'. He continued that 'it is no uncommon thing to meet with men labouring in the fields, mowing hay, digging turf...performing every kind of menial labour, who will write Latin, not merely with grammatical accuracy, but even with elegance', as well as their own language. Picture the scene: in the long winter evenings, kith and kin gathered round the hearth, in their wooden, turf roofed houses reading the romantic stories of their ancestors to each other, while a howling gale blows outside. As printing reached Iceland in about 1530, many of these books would have been in print, as well as the Bible, which was translated into Icelandic in 1584. (Vikor, 1993: 57). Icelandic thereafter became the language of the (now Lutheran) church (as elsewhere in Europe, Latin had been the language of the liturgy hitherto).

Although written Icelandic has remained stable, the spoken language has undergone phonetic changes, most of which had taken place by about 1600. However, one example of phonological change, which included the 'u - epenthesis' before r in certain consonant clusters (in words like *hestur* 'horse' and *fagur* 'beautiful', (Old Icelandic: *hestr* and *fagr*.' (Svenonius, 2002)) has also changed the written language.

There is evidence that variation in the spoken language is happening today. We shall look at some examples of this variation.

2 Linguistic variation in Iceland today

Sociolinguists argue that it is in the spoken language that change originates and that living languages are constantly changing. Historical accounts show *how* languages have changed but not *why* because such diachronic investigation of language is, for the most part, only able to supply general descriptions of written language over time. (Milroy, 1992, Ch. 1) In the last fifty years or so, sociolinguists in many countries, including Iceland, have carried out real and apparent time studies of spoken language, examining the correlations between linguistic variation and social factors. In Iceland this has included status, age, gender, education and area. The analysis of this data show us how speakers effect change and how those changes may then spread.

Holmes (1992: 212) opines that 'the possibility of a linguistic change exists as soon as a new form develops and begins to be used alongside an existing form. If the new form spreads, the change is in progress.'

In 1940-1946, the Government of Iceland commissioned a massive collection of data, headed by Björn Guðfinnsson (referred to as the BG study), encompassing the recording of the speech of a whole year group from most of the primary schools in Iceland, altogether about eight thousand children. Although the sample was very large, the research concentrated only on recording children's reading of set texts. The goal of the BG research was to perform a study of children's pronunciation so as to ascertain which corrective measures were required to achieve purity in the language. Based on these findings, directives on pronunciation were then issued to teachers nationwide. This was, therefore, a deliberate attempt to check a perceived change in progress.

Forty years later, (1980-1986) this study was repeated but enlarged in scope in another major project ,"Rannsókn á íslensku nútímamáli" (RÍN - which translates as "Research on Modern Icelandic Language"), headed by Höskuldur Þráinsson and Kristján Árnason.

The following summary is based on a report by Gíslason and Þráinsson, 2002.

The goals of the RÍN study were to ascertain the following:

- how Icelandic is spoken today
- what is changing and how
- whether language changes only with new generations or whether individuals' language changes in their lifetime
- to make comparisons with studies abroad, eg influence of class and gender.

The research was carried out using the following methods:

- cold calling on people at home;
- visits to schools to interview the children (14 year olds)
- interviews in the work place
- people in Reykjavík visited by appointment

In each case, the researchers explained the reasons for their study, emphasising their interest in differences in pronunciation between parts of the country. These interviews included the following: oral questionnaire, naming of items in pictures, dialogue about these items and reading from set texts. Personal details of the participants included: birth date, where brought up, education and occupation. The data was (and is still being) processed using a statistics programme (SPSS) and Excel among other methods.

The point about this later, follow-up study was that more realistic sampling was performed. A smaller total number of participants was examined (three thousand) over

more age groups, and various speaking styles were recorded, while, at the same time, retaining a valid comparison with the Björn Guðfinnsson´s work (which consisted only of recordings of reading style from set texts). It covered every locality in Iceland, this time also the off-lying islands. The sample was mainly random, except that the people that took part in Björn Guðfinnsson´s previous research were targeted for comparison. To that extent, a real time study was performed.

2.1 Variants found

As in most societies, there is class based stratification in pronunciation within Iceland. It is very important to the more influential age groups (middle aged) to speak 'proper' Icelandic (so as to be taken more seriously) as opposed to the speech of the elderly or young. There has been little respect for the legitimacy of dialect in Iceland - on the contrary, the accepted view has been that only one pronunciation is to be tolerated (due to the pure language movement (hreinræktarstefnan), dating back 300 years at least).

The variants that the original BG study found were the following:

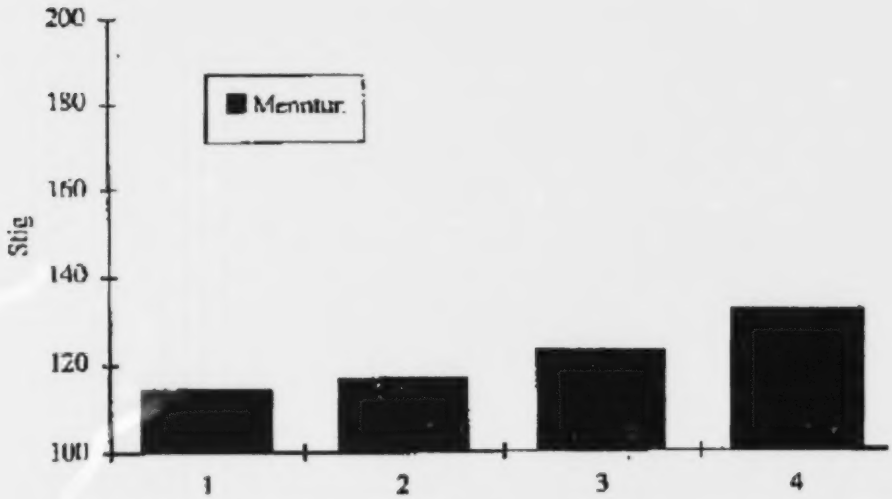
a) flámæli, 'systematic merger in front mid vowels'. (Þráinsson and Árnason, 2002).
b) Linmæli/harðmæli 'bad' versus R.P. (received pronunciation) or standard Icelandic
c) Þágufallssýki, 'dative sickness'.

a) Flámæli: the consequence of this mispronunciation of 'front mid vowels' was that one word often sounded exactly like a different word, for example: *sykur* (sugar) becoming *sekur* (guilty); *viður* (wood) becoming *veður* (weather).etc. Due to the confusion in spelling caused by this 'mispronunciation', schools fought strongly against it. This was found to be prevalent by BG in three areas of south-west Iceland.

The follow-up RÍN study reveals that flámæli has been almost eradicated and the only remnant left is amongst the oldest generation in Reykjavík (Gíslason and Þráinsson, 2002). (Many flámæli speakers since BG's study will have moved to the capital, Reykjavík) When 'My Fair Lady' was translated into Icelandic, Eliza Dolittle spoke *flámæli* to indicate her lower social class. (Gíslason and Þráinsson, 2002) It could be said that social engineering, in this case through education, caused the widespread adoption of the prestige R.P. pronunciation (i.e. a change from above).

b) Linmæli/harðmæli: (poorly spoken or 'soft' (lin) Icelandic as opposed to 'R.P.' or crisp (harð) Icelandic. The follow-up RÍN study found a strong positive correlation between an Icelander's education and his pronunciation. This study's results are as one would expect, that the greater the education, the better the pronunciation or R.P. form of Icelandic (*harðmæli).* This shows that the corrective action taken in schools on the basis of BG's recommendations against the deprecated *linmæli* is having the desired effect, i.e. the adoption of the prestige variant. Examples of *harðmæli* vs *linmæli* are shown below:

tapa - taba to lose (tapa is 'crisp' and taba is 'soft' spoken), *ríki – rígji*, state, and *strákur – strágur*, boy.



Höskuldar og Kristjáns 1984:120). (From Gíslason and Þráinsson, (2002)

This graph shows the correlation between *harðmæli* (R.P) and length of education around 1980
1=compulsory, 2=secondary modern equivalent, 3=Grammar, 4=University

These elements may be compared to Labov's main study in New York in which he divided his informants into groups based on socio-economic class. His findings showed that the prestige pronunciation of /r/ conformed to the social groupings, the upper classes producing more instances of it than the lower classes. In Iceland's case, the well educated versus the less well educated.

c) Þágufallssýki, 'dative sickness'.

According to Friðriksson (2002) 'many teachers of Icelandic have recently claimed that an instability in their students' case-inflectional system....is emerging.' One part of the RÍN study, covering 11 year olds at primary schools in Iceland, has shown that dative sickness occurs amongst the children whose parents are less well educated. 'Dative sickness', is defined by Friðriksson, as 'a tendency for impersonal verbs that normally take accusative-case subjects to take dative-case subjects instead.' He cites other linguistic variables that are spreading, which include "new passive", i.e. a change in how passive sentences are constructed; and "genitive avoidance", the merging of genitive case or genitive case endings with accusative/dative case. (I shall discuss morphological change later, in connection with the history of other Nordic languages.)

The features above, however, are rarely to be seen in the written language, thanks to the efforts made in Icelandic schools. (Purists rejoice!) The important question raised by Friðriksson is whether these variants are stable or whether it indicates that the 'spoken and written language (are) drifting further apart from each other than has been the case so far'. (Friðriksson, 2002)

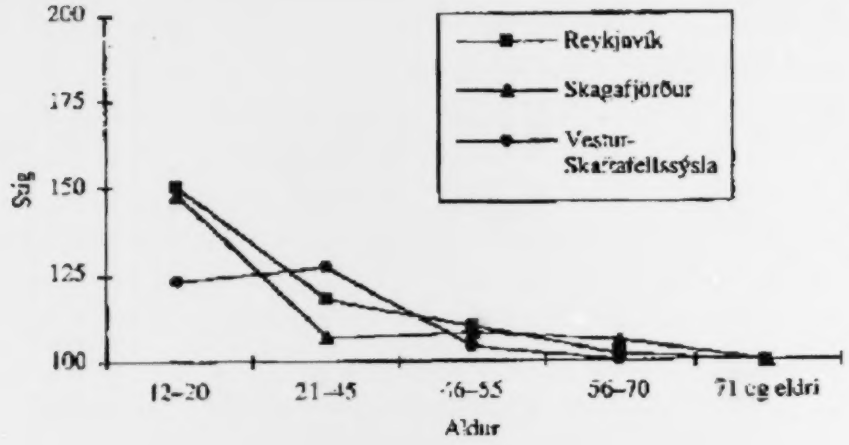
Gíslason and Þráinsson, (2002) summarise one aspect of the RÍN study (which was carried out between 1980 and 1986), which was an apparent time study of the pronunciation of the variable (*ks*) among all age groups in three separate areas of Iceland. Words include *buxur* (trousers), *sex* (six), *hugsun* (thought), and *loksins*, (finally), which, instead of being pronounced in the R.P way as [*gs*], are pronounced with a soft *g* followed by an *s* [x]. The table below is from Gíslason and Þráinsson, 2002.

	ks (velar stop)	*x* (velar fricative)
buxur	[bYgsYr]	[bYxsYr]
sex	[segs]	[sexs]
hugsun	[hYgsYn]	[hYxsYn]
loksins	[logsIns]	[loxsIns]

[Phonetic notation simplified to allow for font limitations.]

Although the data has not yet been fully processed, it can already be stated that the (*ks*) pronunciation is everywhere most prevalent amongst the youngest age group. The authors conclude that 'this is therefore a clear case of a new linguistic variant appearing in the speech of youg people in different parts of the country.' (Gíslason and Þráinsson, 2002) It was also found that the younger women were in advance of the men in adopting this new variant. In another study of words beginning with hv, eg *hvad*, what, *hvenær*, when, *hvar*, where, *hver*, who, it was found that the men were hanging onto the *hv*-pronunciation which was giving way to the new *kv*-pronunciation adopted by the women.

As Labov found in New York, where 'lower-middle-class women were in the vanguard of socially motivated language change' (Wright, 1996: 279), we see a similar phenomenon in Iceland, i.e. that in both the above cases women are leading the change.



Mynd 6.8 ks-framburður í Reykjavík, Skagafirði og Vestur-Skaftafellssýslu um 1980 (RÍN). (Distribution of *ks* pronunciation in Reykjavík, Skagafjörður and West Skaftafell County, around 1980, *(RÍN).*)

Horizontal axis: age
Vertical axis: frequency

The authors of the above study say the cause of this change is unknown.

This pronunciation could possibly be at the bottom end of Chen's *S* curve in his model of lexical diffusion, which reflects 'the general rate of change in a language.' (Mesthrie et al, 2000: 119) In other words in the first phase, A, which shows the new pronunciation in a few common words, before phase B, where the change spreads to other words relatively rapidly, which is represented by a steep rise in the curve. C would show the rate of change tailing off (as with Mesthrie's interpretation of Labov's post vocalic r studies in New York). The question is whether or not the new pronunciation will really take off amongst all groups. As Holmes points out, one of the problems in studying synchronic variation is to predict whether a particular variant will result in change or not. This is because one does not always know if people are using a stable variant, a new one replacing the old, or whether people are resisting the new and going back to the old (Holmes, 2001, Ch.9). In this case, the women are adopting the new and the men hanging on to the old. An important factor, of course, is the purist factor, i.e. whether this new form will be *allowed* to spread.

In Icelandic, pronunciation in the formal reading style tends towards a more standard form, as research has shown in other languages also.

3 Iceland's social network

The linguistic situation in Iceland might be referred to as the 'social motivation of linguistic maintenance' rather than change. Milroy's study in Belfast showed that people living in a high density social network, where members all know each other and interact regularly (e.g., kin, neighbours, fellow workers) used a high degree of conformity of speech, as opposed to a low density network where members may know the central member but not each other and be more open to the influence of other speech forms. To put it simply, Milroy's findings showed that the higher the use of the vernacular, the stronger the network ties (higher NSS (Network Strength Scale), which was measured on a scale of 0 – 5 to indicate the degree of integration into the social network). As Mesthrie (2000: 124) puts it, 'dense and multiplex networks often act as norm enforcement mechanisms'. He goes on to say that 'the social and linguistic norms enforced are, however, not necessarily the prestige norms...' Iceland was ruled by Denmark from about 1400 – 1944 and Danish was therefore the prestige language during that period (more about this later).

Iceland is an example of a conservative social network, though on a larger scale. It is a geographically isolated country with many communities within it separated by rivers, glaciers and mountains. Because of this distance and, indeed, difficulty in communication between the early communities, one might expect diversity in the language rather than uniformity. However, the strong kinship ties between them served to ensure uniformity and conservatism (Milroy, 1992: 196). As Holmes (1992: 235) points out, 'linguistic change progresses most slowly in tightly knit communities which have little contact with the outside world.' The early settlers had all fled from Norway, many left to join kin who had already settled. Many districts were settled by large extended families. Also the annual gathering of the Icelandic parliament, the Althing, provided a meeting place where people came from all over the country to take part in the formulation of laws, for trading purposes etc. This contributed to the stability of the language.

Icelandic was not immune to outside influences though: there were many loan words which were absorbed into the language: after the introduction of Christianity 1000 AD.), terms such as *prestur* , 'priest' and *kirkja* 'church' from Old English and *altari* 'altar' and *djöfull* 'devil' from Old Saxon. (Svenonius, 2002) These words would have been brought to Iceland with the missionaries from Ireland and Britain and have long been part of the spoken and written language. Much vocabulary was also absorbed during the period of Danish rule, eg. k*annski*, perhaps, *akkúrat*, precisely, which are still in use.

The fact remains that, even today, there are only very minor linguistic differences between regions within Iceland. Whether this social network may eventually weaken due to the influence of English, is an issue which will be considered below.

As Milroy's study showed, when social networks are broken up, linguistic change may be on its way. The threat to Icelandic here is not so much that the people on the fringes of the network are being exposed to new forms, but that American/English vocabulary and culture pervades the whole of society. The huge influence of the media, as well as

education in English and of English-dominated computer technology, are the major factors in this in addition to physical contact between peoples.

So how are Icelanders coping with this exposure? They have successfully defended their language in the past from Danish influence. Why should they not resist English for the same reasons? I shall now examine Icelandic's success in the past and postulate what may happen in the future.

4 Other linguistic changes

4.1 Changes in vocabulary

As Milroy (1992: Ch 1) observes, no matter how hard the purists try to resist change, one cannot stop individuals conversing as they like. As indicated above, it is very often the younger people who are the first to adopt new words, and young Icelanders are no exception. There is a thriving night life in downtown Reykjavík based on American culture. Americanisms adopted by young Icelanders include: *smókur,* (a smoke), *pritt*□, (pretty), and *reddy* (ready) alongside the Icelandic words: *reykur, fallęg,* and *tilbúin(n)* (Vikor, 1993: 212). However, as Kvaran and Svavarsdóttir (2002: 87) remind us, these synonyms are 'not considered acceptable in the more formal registers'. But are these new words likely to supplant the Icelandic ones, or to co-exist with them and ultimately come to have different meanings? The English lexicon contains many words, which mean much the same thing because, for example, a French word was adopted alongside its English counterpart. The words may then change in use. The French word 'gentil' became the English word 'jaunty'. Some words have indeed changed in meaning, e.g. sjoppa, from shop, which now has a much narrower meaning, referring specifically to a corner shop or newsagent. (Kvaran and Svavarsdóttir, 2002: 101)

Whether the youth jargon cited above will survive and spread into other social groups, and whether this large hitherto conservative social network will break up and lead to linguistic change has yet to be seen. As Holmes (2001, Ch. 9) has pointed out, as above, young people everywhere are prone to adopting slang words, which later fall by the wayside, being in their turn replaced by the next generation. This has happened in Iceland before. For instance, Iceland was invaded by the British in 1940. The military occupation was then handed over to U.S. troops in 1941. Some estimates have put the number of American troops equalling the number of Icelandic men (population at the time was only 120,000). These troops introduced many English words, eg. *jeppi* (jeep), which is still in use (for any 4x4). Other words introduced at that time have been discarded, eg. *krol,* (crawl (the swimming stroke)), is now obsolete: the new Icelandic word is *skriðsund. Tvist,* as in the dance, has also faded into oblivion. They still use *djass* (jazz), *bridds* ((game of) bridge) and *golf.* (Kvaran and Svavarsdóttir: 103)

Some anglicisms have become the basis for derivatives: e.g., *búsa* (to drink much alcohol), and *bús,* (booze). (Kvaran and Svavarsdóttir: 98) K and S also point out the use of compound words, some of which are hybrids, e.g. *bisnesskona* (business woman) and other compounds, in which both parts of the word are Icelandic but are modelled on English, e.g., *lyklaborð,* keyboard. ((Kvaran and Svavarsdóttir: 102)

4.2 Changes in morphology?

I have mentioned evidence of 'dative sickness' occurring in the Icelandic language today. Historically, the other Nordic languages have lost their inflections, as illustrated below. Is 'dative sickness' the beginning of the slippery slope for Icelandic?

As Crystal (1988: 177) illustrates, 'where Old English would have said '*Þæm scipum*, with a dative ending on both the words for 'the' and 'ship', Middle English would have said 'to the shippes', using a preposition and the common plural ending only.' The Modern Icelandic equivalent is *á þeim skipum*, which has the dative endings, *plus* the preposition. Is this really necessary? Might the endings eventually disappear? Might Icelandic eventually lose all its inflections, like Danish, Norwegian and Swedish before it and modern English? Leith (1996) points out that some linguists have argued that the Old English inflectional system was inefficient and 'ripe for analogical remodelling' (Lass in Leith, 1996: 118). Leith (p: 119) gives the example of the neuter noun, *hus* (house), in which several of the case endings in Old English are the same. This, according to some linguists would have led to the eventual dropping of the endings. However, compare this example with the modern Icelandic below:

	Old English		Modern Icelandic	
	s	pl	s	pl
Nom	hus	hus	hús	hús
Acc	hus	hus	hús	hús
Gen	huses	husa	húss	húsa
Dat	huse	husum	húsi	húsum

Modern Icelandic is almost identical to the Old English form of hus. The above hypothesis is therefore falsified. As Leith (1996: 120) himself says, 'the breakdown of inflections owes as much to processes of contact between speakers of different languages as it does to pressures of a purely internal kind.' This is the fate that befell Danish. The morphological changes began in Denmark, probably due to contact with Low Saxon. The simplified morphology then spread to Norwegian and Swedish. In these languages the conjugation of verbs was reduced to a simple tense, losing distinctions for person, number and mood, while Icelandic retained them. (Vikor, 1993: 38). Vikor (p: 39) gives an example of the paradigm of the regular verb, to love, Icelandic: að elska, Danish: at elske

	Icelandic			
	Present indicative		present subjunctive	past indic. and subjunct.
I	Ég	elska	elski	elskaði

You (s)	Þú	elskar	elskir	elskaðir
He	Hann	elskar	elski	elskaði
We	Við	elskum	elskum	elskuðum
You	Þið	elskið	elskið	elskuðuð
They	Þeir	elska	elski	elskuðu

Modern Danish covers all the above with two forms: present tense: elsker, past: elskede.

While Danish, along with Swedish and Norwegian, has completely lost its case system, Icelandic has retained its four cases. Danish also has only two genders, having merged the masculine and feminine forms into one. (Vikor: 36). Icelandic has maintained all three, ie masculine, feminine, and neuter.(as well as strong and weak versions of each).

Icelandic has also preserved its vowel mutations. In Old English the plural of *boc* (book) was *bec*. An *s* was adopted in the early Middle English period. (Crystal, 1988: 178) Icelandic for book is *bók* in the singular and *bækur* in the plural. While English has lost most of its vowel mutations, Icelandic has preserved them so far.

The above discussion might imply that Icelandic has remained stable for so long due to lack of contact. This is not the case. Iceland was under Danish rule from around 1400 to 1944 and the language was influenced by Danish. Some, as reported by Svenonius, (2002) 'believed that the Icelandic language would soon become extinct'. Iceland had little contact with other countries than Denmark. Danish was spoken as the language of business, by merchants, and by upper class Icelanders in the main towns of Reykjavík and Akureyri. It was therefore the prestige language. However, Icelandic did not disappear. Why? Norwegians, also under the Danish Crown, lost their language, replaced by Danish, and had to reinvent their language in the nineteenth century. Norwegian was, however, divided into many dialects and 'there was no established and vital Norwegian written language available to contest Danish supremacy.' (Vikor: 58) As witnessed by Barrow's travels in Iceland in 1834, although Icelanders were socially and economically backward, they were held together by a strong social network plus a strong literary tradition, which suppressed change. Indeed, most Icelanders will argue that it is precisely because they are so proud of their literature and culture that they resist linguistic change. Iceland even has an 'Icelandic Language Day' on 16th November, which is the birth date of a renowned 19th century poet, Jónas Hallgr□msson. The Ministry of Culture 'makes it the focus of a special campaign to promote the language' (The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Iceland, 2001: 20) and special events organised by many institutions are held to mark the day.

Icelanders were also exploited by the Danes. (The Danish Crown not only taxed the local people, but also auctioned off monopoly rights to trade to Danish merchants.) Therefore, rather than adopt Danish, the opposite happened. There is certainly an element here of hostility to the Danes being one factor in resistance to change. Rather like the inhabitants of Martha's Vineyard and the findings made by Labov, the use of the vernacular (in this case, Icelandic) 'indicates solidarity with local people, customs and norms' (Mesthrie: 129). Danish was associated with high social status but was resisted by the rural

Icelander, who identified with his own community. Holmes refers to this as 'covert' prestige. (Holmes: 237)

The same theory may apply to English prevailing over French in the later Middle Ages in England. French had been the language of the upper class, the courts, government, and the official written language was French. Was the success of English based on hostility to the French and a sense of group identity? There would, of course, have been many other social factors at work, but this was probably one of them.

5 Implications for the future of Icelandic and the role of language planning in the maintenance of Icelandic purism

'Iceland is today a rare example of a totally homogeneous linguistic nation-state.'(Vikor, 1993: 58) The motives for purism in the language may in part be due to the fact that Iceland was a colony of Denmark. The elimination of Danish words gained momentum in the fight for independence (1800-1944) when there was a concerted effort in Iceland by the intelligentsia (often themselves based abroad, mainly in Copenhagen, the centre of power) to rid the language of foreign 'pollution'. This has been remarkably effective. The Icelandic Language Committee (ILC), established by act of parliament in 1964, is not merely content with purging the language of Danish vocabulary, but resists incursions from English by inventing neologisms for words, even for specialised terminologies. Therefore, a word such as computer is derived from a combination of the plural of the noun, *tölur* (number) and the noun *völva*, (prophetess) to make *tölva*. It assimilates other words into Icelandic morphology, eg. *tékki*, cheque. This borrowed word has now been mostly displaced by the neologism, *ávísun*. In the case of *sígaretta*, cigarette, however, the neologism invented, *vindlingur*, is spurned! The ILC also produces spelling dictionaries and makes pronouncements about the official use of language. (This naturally includes ridding Icelandic of 'bad' pronunciation, ie that which is not R.P.) Attempts have also been made – as part of language policy - to hark back to the "Golden Age", reintroducing features long gone from the modern language. For example, what used to be spelt with *je* is now spelt using é, as in *ég* instead of *jeg* for 'I' and *hér* instead of *hjer* for 'here'. This spelling was changed in the early twentieth century and codified in spelling rules by the precursor of the ILC.

Language maintenance as defined by Crystal is 'where one language is holding its own despite the influence of powerful neighbours' (Crystal, 1987: 362). The question which now arises is whether Icelandic can continue to hold its own. The influence of another language has never been so great and English has not seeped, but poured into that hitherto isolated island. The major areas it has swept into are listed below.

- *education*
- *information technology*
- *mass media, communications and the entertainment industry*

5.1 Education

English took over from Danish as the first foreign language that Icelanders learn from the age of 10 in 1999 (Kelly et al, 2002). It remains compulsory throughout upper secondary education. In higher education contact with other countries and the learning of foreign languages is highly stressed. Iceland participates in the Socrates/Erasmus programme as well as Nordplus - for its teachers and students. English today has a far greater influence than Danish (the colonial master's language) ever had. According to Rasmussen (2002), a Danish teacher in Iceland, teachers have been 'fighting against the Icelanders' forgetting Danish totally' and he bemoans the fact that the students 'question the raison d'etre of teaching other languages than English.' He goes on to say that 'there are few things as stimulating and motivating for learning as knowing that there is power and influence in what you learn' and that when the power connected with that language wanes there is no longer the same motivation for learning it. Thus Danish has become a less widely spoken language and has had to take second place. Most Icelandic children have picked up some English even before starting school, from the media, videos and the internet. Because of the small population and the expense, text books, for example of medicine and science, are often in English. (Forty years ago, during my husband's schooling, the majority of text books of this type were in Danish.) The level of understanding of English by students therefore has to be high.

There is a problem of conflicting desires amongst language planners in Iceland: on the one hand English is promoted as a language that is necessary for everyone to learn, on the other, Anglicisms are shunned, especially in the written language, as part of deliberate policy. If they do get assimilated, they often become unrecognisable from the English written form, eg *sjans* (chance). This is because there is 'usually a more regular connection between pronunciation and spelling in Icelandic' compared to English. (Kvaran and Svavarsdóttir: 93). Anglicisms are seldom entered in Icelandic dictionaries, partly due to reasons of language policy and partly because they are comparatively new (Kvaran and Svavarsdóttir, 2002: 87).

We may compare the situation in Iceland with that of Denmark. In Denmark, English is also learned in schools from the age of 10, yet English has taken over from Danish in many domains. Crystal records an interview with a Danish University student (1987: 360), who said that everyone in Denmark spoke English, because 'if we didn't, there wouldn't be anyone to talk to.' In March 1998, a conference was organised in Denmark by the Danish Language Council to discuss this problem. Two of the authors of a paper presented there voiced their concern 'that Danish is losing prestige through widespread use of English in key domains' (Phillipson, 2001: 23) and regret the fact that Denmark has not followed the policies of Iceland (and now Norway). Research has shown that bilingualism is a prerequisite to language shift (as in Susan Gal's study of Oberwart where Hungarian is being taken over by German). So, as English takes over as the language of business and scientific communication, it is a small step to 'English monolingualism'. There are those who argue that it is futile to intervene in the process of language change and that the *laissez faire* policy is the right one. (Phillipson, 2001) Even though the languages immediately surrounding Denmark are not English, this is seen as

the prestige language, particularly among the young, and if something is not done to halt the invasion, Danish, like Hungarian in Oberwart, may be soon confined to domains such as the home or in talking to God.

5.2 Information Technology

Amongst the Icelandic Government's statement of objectives for its 'vision of the information society', is written:

The educational system shall adapt to changed social dynamics and focus general education and continuing education upon the advantages of the information society while, at the same time, keeping watch over our language and culture.

One of the ways of implementing the objectives is:

In re-examining curricula at all levels of schooling, emphasis should be placed on the development of all subjects in accordance with the possibilities offered by information technology. An important aspect in this process is good knowledge of the mother tongue and other languages. In the international arena, a thorough knowledge of English is especially important.

More specific still:

Watch must be kept over the Icelandic language since there is a national desire that Icelandic be applied in the basic elements of information technology and computerized data; all kinds of lore and cultural materials –as much as possible – will be in Icelandic.

A major problem for the ILC was that the Government had decided (as far back as 1993) to standardize on Microsoft products in all schools (and elsewhere in Government), but Microsoft had refused to translate its software into Icelandic due to the small size of the Icelandic market. (Williams Walsh, 1998). As Williams Walsh explained in an article in the Los Angeles Times,

For even as (Iceland's) language specialists were defending the purity of their ancestral tongue, they were also making sure every schoolchild here learned English. With the entire population now proficient in English as a second language, Microsoft sees no point in translating Windows into their proud mother tongue; it can just sell them the English version.

According to the Minister of Education, Björn Bjarnason (2002), there was so much furore about this article (picked up by the BBC), that Microsoft eventually relented (in January 1999, when an agreement was signed) and a company was set up to translate the software, (initially Windows 98 and Internet Explorer). In exchange the Icelandic authorities undertook to take robust measures to combat software pirating in the country!

Subsequently, Microsoft was persuaded to adapt their spelling and grammar checking engine (used, among other applications, in Word for Windows) to Icelandic. This situation is ongoing as Microsoft brings out new versions (e.g. Windows 2000 and XP). Microsoft has estimated that it would cost ten times as much to translate/localise XP as it had for Windows 98. (Bjarnason, 2002) The Icelandic Government has allocated one million pounds sterling towards Icelandic language engineering in IT (in 2001/2002).

This problem is continuously being addressed by The Icelandic Standards Council. In a document on language engineering, Briem, (2002) states that,

'Iceland has one of the world's highest per capita rates of computer ownership, and one of the highest rates of Internet access and use. The need for Icelandic to cope with the demands of information technology is therefore greater than might be thought in terms of the population size alone'.

He quotes from the booklet *Í krafti upplýsinga* (Power of Information), published by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1996,

It is necessary to promote the use of Icelandic in information technology and to encourage the production of material at a suitable rate so as to ensure access to the widest possible range of material in Icelandic. Producers in Iceland must be able to use new technology and contribute towards a good supply of Icelandic material on CDs and the Internet in the years ahead.

This would include the writing of software and the compilation of an electronic dictionary and a thesaurus accessible to everyone. There should be search engines on the Internet capable of searching for material in Icelandic. As he points out, for some languages, it is enough to identify the stem of the word and search for all the forms beginning with that stem, but more complex procedures have to be developed for Icelandic, due to its inflections. (Briem, 2002) For example, when looking up the word 'man', the search engine needs to take into account the eight (singular) forms: maður, mann, manni, manns, maðurinn, manninn, manninum, mannsins (the last four with definite article suffixed), not to mention as many again in the plural, to cover all contexts.

Icelandic diplomatic efforts were successful (only just) in having the Icelandic special alphabetic characters incorporated in the dominant computer character set (ISO-Latin1), but only at the expense of the Turks!

The crucial thing here is that the very future of Icelandic may be under threat, due to the dominance of English in information technology world-wide. As the report says, 'If Iceland does not take this step, there is a danger that it will prove difficult to use Icelandic in the information society.' (Briem, 2002)

5.3 Mass media, communications and the entertainment industry

English has become the international language in fields of communication, for example air traffic communications. I used to work at the aeronautical communications station just outside Reykjavík, as a Radio Officer. The Reykjavík control area covers a huge area from the Greenwich Meridian to c. 70W and from 60N to the North Pole. The responsibility of the Radio personnel is to take down position reports and send messages to and from the pilots, allocate radio frequencies and hand the pilots over to other control areas and communication zones. All this communication is necessarily in a language that everyone understands, at least within the limits set by voice procedure. Likewise communications at sea are all carried out in English from the same centre, using voice procedures in English and Morse code in English.

In the same way, the many import/export businesses in Iceland have to communicate with their business partners in English. They need markets for fish (which make up 80% of exports) and need in turn to buy equipment for the fisheries from, e.g. China or Japan as well as Europe. With the other Nordic countries they may use a Scandinavian language but more and more often they use English. As Crystal points out this is because 'there is no competitor for English as a World language.' (Crystal, 1988: 262) Iceland is also becoming a tourist destination for those who enjoy volcanic landscapes and glaciers, the observation of whales, midnight sun/perpetual darkness and bird watching, among other things. Tourists are unlikely to have even a smattering of Icelandic, so the Icelanders must speak English.

American English is seen as a prestige language, particularly by the young. There is a vast quantity of videos, films and popular music that is in English, although the ILC has successfully sought to have all imported programmes and films for children dubbed into Icelandic, likewise all commercials. (This is very expensive.) Other imported material for general viewing is only subtitled. That linguistic changes are in danger of happening, therefore, is evidenced by the determined efforts to prevent them.

Summary

In this paper, I have shown how social factors such as age, gender and education have influenced spoken Icelandic and how purist language policies have attempted to stamp out these variations. It seems inevitable though that in Iceland, as elsewhere, despite the best efforts of the policy makers, there will continue to be linguistic variation in the spoken language, even if each time brought to heel. History has shown this, as has recent research. The ILC, however, is working strenuously to keep the spoken language from veering too much from the written. I have shown that Iceland's strong social network has resisted change over the centuries, while the other Nordic languages have undergone drastic changes, particularly in morphology. This resistance has been partly due to pride in their strong literary tradition and high level of literacy. At the same time Icelandic has assimilated many foreign words throughout its history. It is likely that foreign (predominantly English) vocabulary will continue to be assimilated as well as many neologisms invented. There is some evidence of morphological changes in spoken

Icelandic by the young, but it is doubtful that these changes will reach the written language, due to the high stress put on education and literacy in the mother tongue and the insistence on purity, which is fully supported by the Icelandic Government.

However, Iceland, though isolated geographically, is now exposed to the wide world, the biggest threat to the use of Icelandic being that of information technology. It remains to be seen whether the Establishment will continue to be successful in its promotion of Icelandic in this form.

The globalisation of English, although having an enormous influence in Iceland, is also having the effect of strengthening Icelandic's resistance to change. As one Icelandic anthropologist put it, 'when the big world out there seems to be taking over, people turn to what makes them culturally different from others, not what they have in common with others,' (Kristmundsdóttir, 1997) in this case their pride in their literary heritage and culture. No doubt the Icelanders also view the demise of Danish in Denmark with pity and take heed of this, further nurturing their own purist language policies. It is a long standing belief in Iceland that without the efforts of the ILC and its predecessors that the language by now would have changed dramatically. There is no doubt, therefore, that the ILC with its 26 subcommittees will do its best to fend off the English invasion through legislation and language planning for some time to come.

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Amanda Hilmarsson-Dunn works on various projects within the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, (LLAS) and the School of Modern Languages at the University of Southampton.

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